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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ANKARA 002388

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TAGS: PGOV PREL PHUM TU

SUBJECT: FEARS OF CONTINUED UNREST HIGH THROUGHOUT TURKEY'S SOUTHEAST

REF: A. ADANA 60

- 1B. ADANA 64
- 1C. ADANA 67
- 1D. ADANA 68
- 1E. ADANA 82
- 1F. ADANA 72

Classified by Consulate Adana Principal Officer W. Scott, Reid, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (U) This message is from Consulate Adana.

12. (C) Summary: Expectations of continued unrest remain high in Diyarbakir throughout Turkey's southeast. Many believe the PKK was able to exploit latent tensions building over the past few years and benefited from the recent unrest. Most Kurdish observers conclude that the security forces used excessive force during the unrest. NGOs have reported widespread allegations of torture by security forces. The high level of fear and expectations of continuing problems in the region are exacerbated by continuing GOT nationalist rhetoric and the expected passage of a new anti-terror law that Diyarbakir lawyers and NGOs claim is more draconian than policies followed during the state of emergency in the early 1990s. Security forces roughed up pro-Kurdish Democratic Society Party (DTP) mayors in Diyarbakir, Kiziltepe and Viransehir during the recent unrest. End Summary.

Tensions Remain High

13. (C) During an April 18-21 trip to Turkey's southeast, Consulate Adana officers found that tensions remain high in Diyarbakir and other cities one month after civil unrest in the area left 12 people dead and hundreds in police custody. Diyarbakir Human Rights Association (HRA) representatives and other contacts believe the March 28-31 demonstrations (reftel A) marked the transition of PKK-related activities from rural to urban areas, and fear that the tension and sporadic unrest could continue. Our contacts told us that people in the region are fed up with the violence, but retain high expectations of continued civil unrest. Although none of our contacts could say with certainty why the unrest broke out when it did, most agree that it was largely the result of the PKK exploiting conditions of increasing frustration stemming from numerous perceived false starts in Turkish democratization for the region since 2002.

¶4. (C) Our interlocutors believe that the demonstrations were easy for the PKK to stage given the large number of young unemployed males in the city. Estimates range between 12,000 and 30,000 unemployed, teenage men from squatter districts, alienated from society, with no hope of employment and a lack of identification with a GoT they feel is determined to press a pan-Turkish agenda in a predominantly Kurdish ethnic region. One contact called Diyarbakir,s social situation the &devil,s playground.⁸ DTP Diyarbakir Mayor Osman Baydemir claimed that he and other DTP leaders defused a showdown between PKK instigators and GoT forces in the Hakkari province town of Yuksekova on the first day of Newroz in March, winning acclaim from the regional subgovernor. Baydemir said that peaceful outcome left the PKK frustrated that it could not use the region,s Newroz celebration as more of a lever to cause instability in the region. He said that the late March civil unrest showed the PKK,s desire to make its presence and influence clear to the GoT. In his analysis, police violence against minors during the demonstrations helped the PKK gain new adherents. Baydemir added, however, that the PKK should not take all the blame for the violence, since it was clear to him that some hard core military and government officials were also seeking to deepen the clashes between government forces and the PKK. We called on Baydemir to clearly distance DTP and himself from the PKK and its determination to use terrorism in the region.

¶5. (C) Diyarbakir provincial Govrnor Efkan Ala told us that the GOT had been unsuccessful in containing the PKK in their

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mountain strongholds, and until that issue was resolved, the PKK would continue to have influence in cities like Diyarbakir. He said the GOT expects assistance from the U.S. against the PKK in Iraq, but added that a more comprehensive approach was needed for the region,s problems. He also said that he had told the national government that, while security actions against the PKK were part of the solution, additional democratization also was necessary to deprive the PKK of popular support and sympathy.

Reports of Excessive Force and Torture

¶6. (C) Many of our Kurdish contacts claimed that the police used excessive force in their confrontations with demonstrators. HRA representatives claimed that the loss of life and use of force by security forces was disproportionate to the threat posed by the demonstrators. They said that of 392 people wounded in the clashes, 100 of them were wounded by firearms. They added that demonstrators used rocks and Molotov cocktails, while police responded with tear gas, water cannon, truncheons and firearms. They said that many people with bullet wounds refused to go the hospital for treatment, fearing detention and possible torture. However, Diyarbakir businessman and Southeastern Industrialists and Businessmens Association President Shahismail Bedirhanoglu credited security forces and Governor Efkan Ala with restraint.

¶7. (C) Ala told us that although he had issued an order to the security forces not to use firearms against demonstrators, firearms were nevertheless used on both sides. He said his office is investigating details of firearms use by both security forces and demonstrators. He claimed that several of the first autopsies performed so far indicated so-called gunshot wounds were more accurately attributed to shrapnel from tear gas grenades, which he regretted, and plunging blows from rocks which he said demonstrators probably had thrown. He vowed to investigate any credible claims brought to him about official use of force; Diyarbakir

Bar Association contacts told us they planned to approach him with over a hundred such cases later in the week. The head of Dicle University Hospital told us that of the 43 patients they received during the demonstrations, 21 had received bullet wounds. He told us that only 2 wounded police officers were received at Dicle University Hospital; one with a bullet wound and one with a trauma wound. He told us that most wounded security forces personnel were hospitalized at military hospitals for security reasons.

¶8. (C) Several NGOs reported allegations of police torture. Allegations included systematic use of high pressure cold water hoses, rough beatings, forced bodily contortions and naked exposure of detainees for extended periods of time. The NGOs plan to take these reports to government officials to seek official investigations and potential prosecutions (reftel B). Representatives from the Diyarbakir Physicians' Association told us that the police had forced some doctors to go to detention centers during the unrest to check and prepare reports on detainees. They said that normal procedures established by international human rights treaties required that detainees be brought to fully equipped hospitals for examination. The physicians said that they were told by security forces to only write down what they saw when they examined detainees. They were not allowed to investigate how the injuries came about. The physicians told us that they were allowed to provide treatment * mostly first aid * to those detainees that required it. They believed this was an attempt by security officials to assert that the detainees injuries were sustained during the unrest, and not from torture. They also expressed concern that these activities represented a reversion to the old policies practiced during the early 1990s when doctors were forced to make false reports about detainees.

¶9. (C) The physicians told us that the violence had inflicted deep physical and psychological wounds in the people of region. They told us that besides what they considered the high number of deaths, including minors, and injuries, some ambulances were damaged and health personnel were injured by participants on both sides. The physicians reported that

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many patients during and since the period of unrest complained of post-traumatic stress, and told doctors that they expected the unrest to increase.

Fear of Anti-Terror Law

¶10. (C) Local ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) officials told us that they did not find the Prime Minister and other ministers, nationalist rhetoric constructive in dealing with the issues in Diyarbakir. The Bar Association was very concerned about the possible negative effects of the new anti-terror bill. They characterized the bill as being more sweeping and draconian than the state of emergency regime in the early 1990s. The Bar is particularly concerned that the new law will leave very wide discretion to judges and prosecutors to treat controversial speech as terrorism. If passed, they predicted that the law would provide an excuse for prosecutors to participate in a wide range of human rights transgressions and to truncate any form of cultural and political freedom of expression that has accumulated over the last 2-3 years. Cemal Dogan, who runs a television and radio station which just started Kurdish broadcasts, worried that news reports on clashes could be construed as supporting the PKK under the new law, resulting in his station's closure. He also noted that, similar to regulatory guidelines which eventually strangled Kurdish language schools, his station is struggling to meet extensive and costly production requirements for Kurdish broadcasting, such as full, simultaneous sub-titling.

Region's DTP Mayors Treated Roughly by Security Forces

¶11. (C) The DTP mayors of Kiziltepe and Viransehir (reftel C), as well as other contacts in the region, told us they feared a resurgence of unrest unless the GOT was able to find peaceful democratic measures to address the many problems of the region. Both mayors, along with Diyarbakir Mayor Baydemir (reftel D) were treated roughly by security forces during the unrest. Police insulted, and blocked the office entrance of, the Kiziltepe mayor on the first day of the unrest. A member of the pro-government village guards fired at the Viransehir mayor. The mayor claimed that jandarma intelligence had encouraged the local village guards to fire on him. The shot wounded a police officer standing behind the mayor. The mayor told us that the village guard member had still not been apprehended or brought to justice, but the village guard member's parents apologized to the mayor for their son's actions and explained to him that the jandarma brainwashed their son and ordered him to fire at the mayor.

Comment

¶12. (C) Contacts in Diyarbakir seemed more discouraged and downbeat than at any time in the last three years. Some who were veterans of the 1990s violence feared the region would slide back into the era of violence from which it emerged several years ago. Several longtime observers, such as Bar Association Head Sezgin Tanrikulu, saw prospects for escalating violence that would feed on polarized regional sentiment and resurgent Turkish nationalism. He also pointed out that the PKK had succeeded in reaching a new generation of frustrated Kurdish youth in the recent street clashes, adding that with a lack of education, jobs and cultural dignity,⁸ this group could be manipulated easily. He feared that the PKK might try to tap these disaffected youths again soon for further violence. However, now that the AKP government is focusing on elections, the GOT's only contemplated response is draft anti-terror legislation. End Comment.

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WILSON